

NEWS RELEASE

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Former Paxton Woman Charged with Bank Fraud

Urbana, IL - Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, announced that a federal grand jury in Springfield has returned an indictment charging Rebekah Etheridge, age 30, a former resident of Paxton, Illinois, currently residing in Denham Springs, Louisiana, with two counts of bank fraud and one count of bank embezzlement.

The indictment alleges that Etheridge, a former employee of Farmers-Merchants National Bank of Paxton, defrauded the bank of approximately \$240,000 between December 1998 and March 20, 2006. According to the indictment, Etheridge was employed in the bank's bookkeeping department and had access to its internal accounts. She allegedly removed funds from the bank's internal checking accounts and placed those funds in her own checking and savings accounts. Etheridge allegedly hid her fraud by falsifying figures on the bank's internal records to make it appear that all accounts in the bank's general ledger balanced.

A summons will be issued for Etheridge to appear in federal court in Urbana, Illinois at a date to be determined by the Clerk of the U.S. District Court.

If convicted, each charged offense carries a possible maximum sentence of 30 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$1,000,000.

The case was investigated by the United States Secret Service and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Hilary W. Frooman.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; the defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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